

Well versed in math

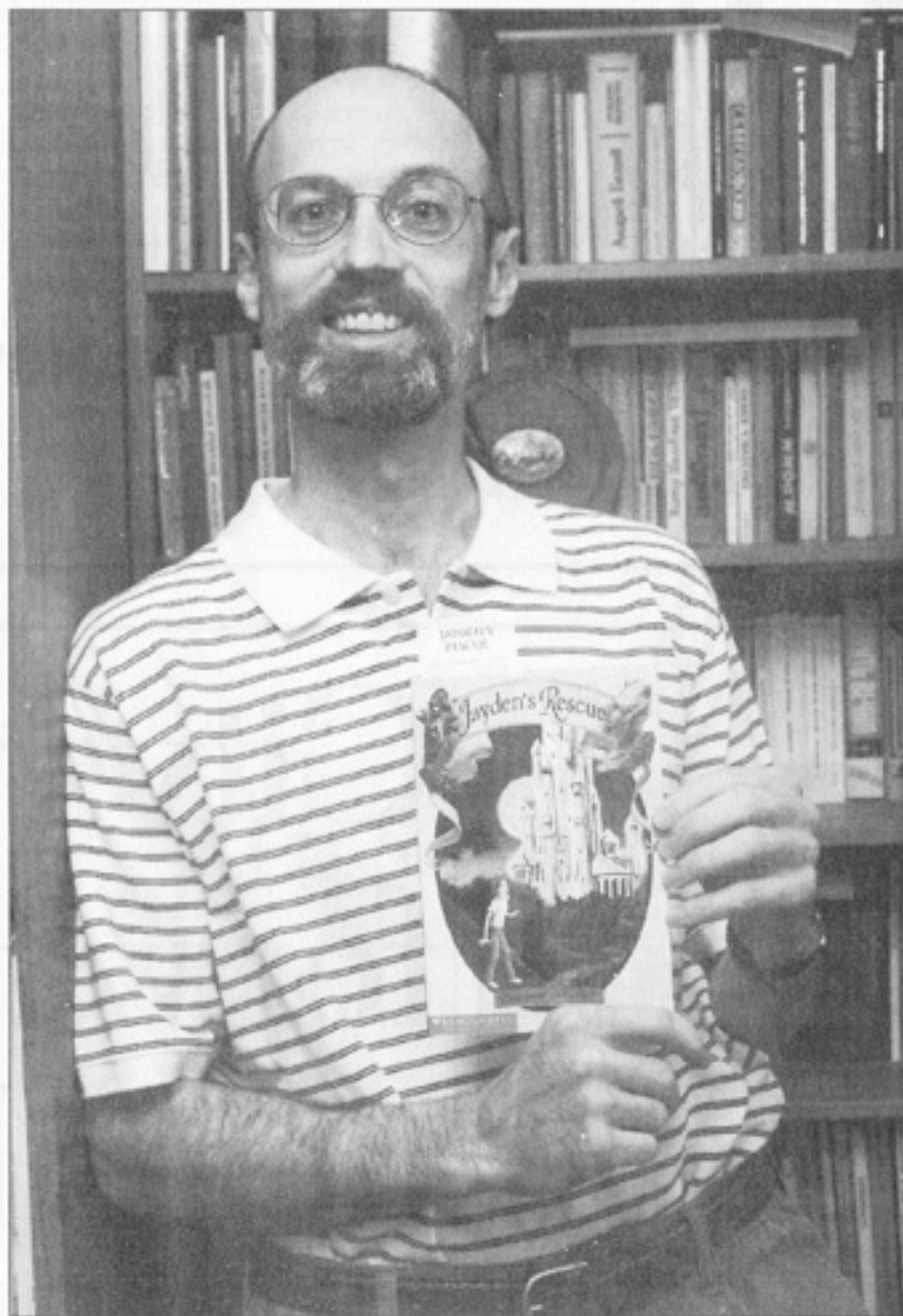
Beautiful Queen Jayden is trapped in a castle by a grotesque five-headed monster. Her only hope for escape is to find the solution to the following verse:

*My heads have lots of hair to comb,
it's hard to find the time.
So when I comb a head of hair,
my parents pay a dime.
Each head is combed in sequence,
always one-two-three-four-five.
My mom says order is a goal
for which good monsters strive.
I'm proud to say that now I've earned
twelve dollars, fair and square.
How often, tell me, have I combed
each shaggy head of hair?
(from *Jayden's Rescue*)*

Wait a minute, wait a minute. That sounds like a math problem in disguise! What's it doing in a story about a beautiful queen stuck in a castle?

The author of the verse, former Edmontonian Vladimir Tumanov, says he's found a way to unglue the word "boring" from math in children's minds. He got the idea for *Jayden's Rescue* — a fantasy novel whose plot revolves around math problems written in rhyming verse — while trying to help his nine-year-old son, Alex, with his math homework.

"He found it boring, and I've noticed a lot of children respond with 'boring' when they hear math," Tumanov says. "And so I began to think of what they don't find boring."



BRUCE EDWARDS, THE JOURNAL

Vladimir Tumanov, who has just published his first children's novel, *Jayden's Rescue*

EDMONTON INSIDE & OUT by Eliza Barlow

And what he discovered, looking to the huge popularity of the Harry Potter series, was fantasy fiction. He decided to

combine the literary genre with math. "The problem-solving process is the same — you run up against a wall and you

have to find an exit," he says. "So you can compare a math problem-solver to Harry Potter, if you don't look at it as just numbers."

The plot of *Jayden's Rescue* begins when some modern children — Alex, Vanessa (named after Tumanov's two children) and their friends — come across a fantasy book, complete with wizards, castles, dungeons and monsters. The children soon realize that their actions are determining the fate of one of the characters in the book, Queen Jayden, who's trapped in a castle. In order to save her, Alex and his friends must solve a series of math puzzles that are posed to Jayden by assorted monsters. Eventually the line between fantasy and reality becomes completely blurred and the children are dragged into the adventure.

Tumanov's intention is that children will solve each math problem before continuing with the story. The testimony of one Prince Edward Island teacher was music to Tumanov's ears: she told him she read the book aloud to her class, but she refused to read past the math problems until the children solved them.

The problems cover elements of the Grade 4 through Grade 6 math curriculum, from exponents to pre-algebra.

Tumanov was born in Moscow, Russia, in 1961 and emigrated to Canada with his parents at age 12, moving to Edmonton at age 19. He did a BA degree and a PhD at the University of Alberta. He also worked for a year as a transla-

tor for the government of Alberta. He teaches modern languages at the University of Western Ontario.

Tumanov may have inherited some literary genes. His mother, Alla, won the City of Edmonton book prize in 2000 for *Where We Buried the Sun*, published by the NeWest Press.

Also in 2000, his father Alexander's book, *The Life and Artistry of Olenina D'Alheim*, was published by U of A Press.

Though Vladimir Tumanov teaches children's literature, *Jayden's Rescue* is the first non-scholarly book he's published.

"I underwent my training in children's writing by reading countless novels to my son out loud," he says. "I didn't realize it while I was doing it, but that was my school."

Tumanov has already written a sequel which uses the same characters and form, but is aimed at teaching geography rather than math. He's thinking about a third one that will tackle history. "I hope to write a series which will transform the learning process, so that the child feels he or she is on an adventure," he says.

He lives with his children and his wife, Larissa, in London, Ont., but they miss Edmonton and hope to return here to live some day.

If you know of any interesting people, places or activities in the Edmonton area — from the serious to the ridiculous — we'd love to hear from you. Please send us your suggestions by phoning us at 498-5862, fax 429-5500 or e-mail msadava@thejournal.southam.ca